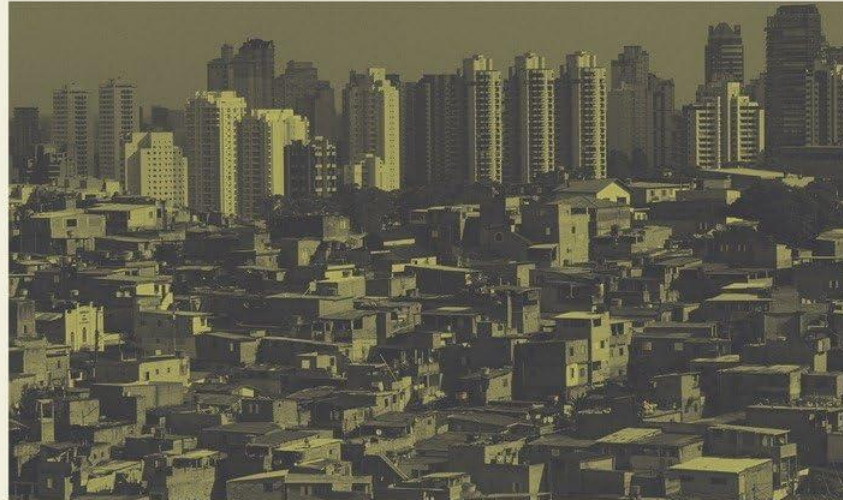


"A profound enquiry into an urgent subject ... a brilliant book."  
—ARUNDHATI ROY

# PLANET OF SLUMS



# MIKE DAVIS

“Today’s poor megacities - Nairobi, Lagos, Bombay, Dhaka, and so on - are stinking mountains of shit that would appall even the most hardened Victorians. (Except, perhaps, Rudyard Kipling, a connoisseur, who in *The City of Dreadful Night* happily distinguished the ‘Big Calcutta Stink’ from the unique pungencies of Bombay, Peshawar, and Benares.)”

How would you describe Mike Davis’s writing style, and how would you evaluate it?

- “Dickensian” (*Oliver Twist*, *Bleak House*), “realist”, “honest”, “cold indignation”
- “insensitive”, “lacking compassion”/“lack of compassion”, “vulgar”, “insulting”

Rudyard Kipling: “Let us sleep, let us sleep, and pray that **Calcutta** may be better to-morrow. **At present it is remarkably like sleeping with a corpse.**”

“In contemporary India – where an estimated 700 million people are forced to defecate in the open – only 17 of 3700 cities and large towns have any kind of primary sewage treatment before final disposal. A study of 22 slums in India found 9 with no latrine facilities at all; in another 10, there were just 19 latrines for 102,000 people. The filmmaker Prahlad Kakkar, the auteur of the toilet documentary Bumbay, told a startled interviewer that in Bombay ‘half the population doesn’t have a toilet to shit in, so they shit outside. That’s five million people. If they shit half a kilo each, that’s two and a half million kilos of shit each morning.’”

# Death-trap toilets: the hidden dangers of Mumbai's poorest slums

Poorly-constructed toilet blocks have led to the deaths of seven people in three months, but politicians are yet to act on their promises for change



📷 In Mumbai slums, 78% of community toilets lack water supply, 58% have no electricity and many don't have proper doors. Photograph: Alamy Stock Photo

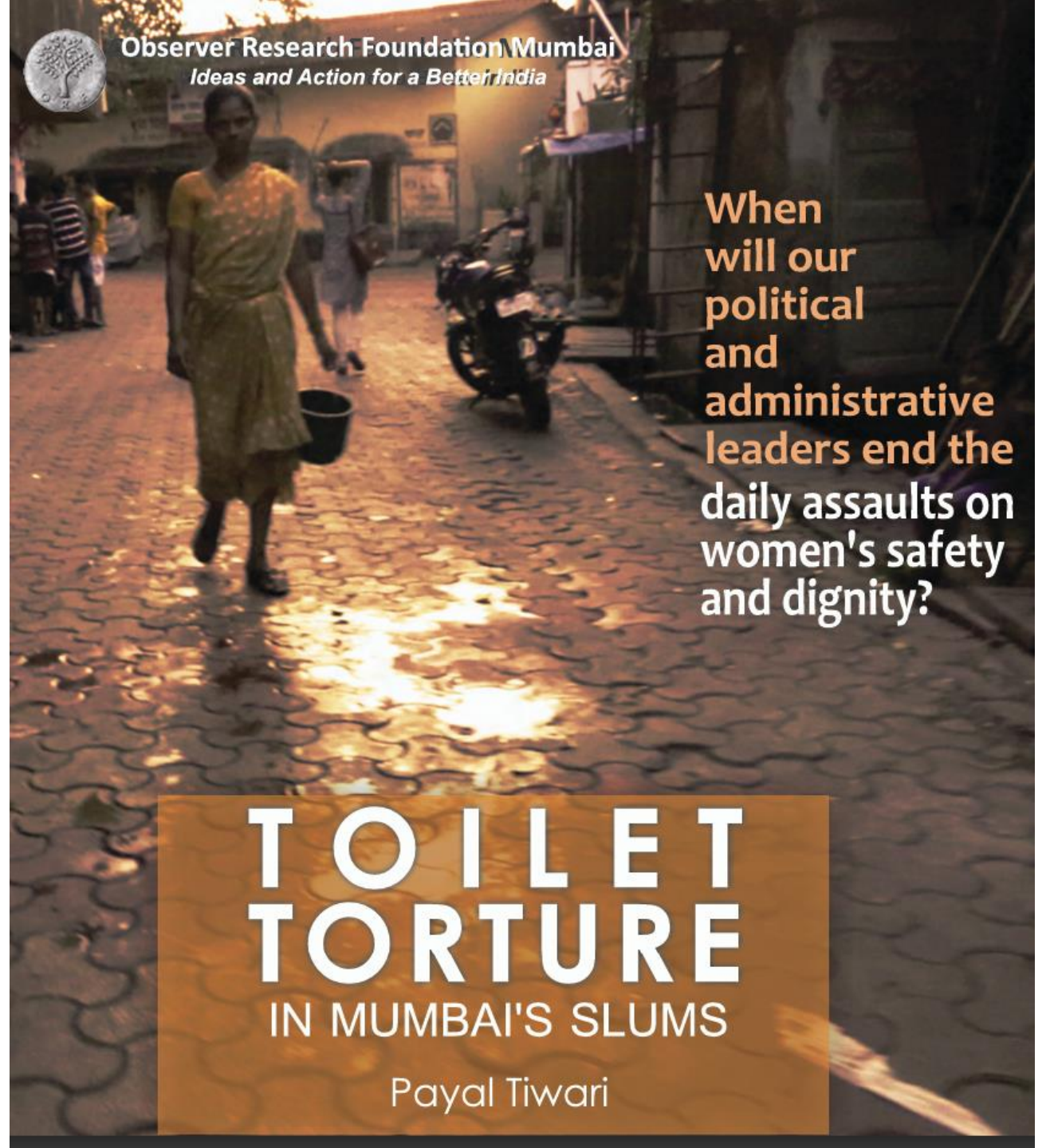
**O**n the morning of 4 February, Harish Tikedar, Ganesh Soni, and Mohammed Isafil Ansari waited in a queue to use the community toilet in the Indira Nagar slum in eastern [Mumbai](#). All of a sudden the floor collapsed, plunging Tikedar, Soni and Ansari into the septic tank 15-feet below.



# “Catch-22 situation”

- a **paradoxical dilemma** in which one cannot achieve a desired outcome because of self-contradictory rules or conditions; compliance with one requirement inherently prevents meeting another
- origin: Joseph Heller’s 1961 novel *Catch-22*, where a military regulation states that airmen deemed insane can be grounded, but anyone who requests to be grounded on grounds of insanity is by that act declared sane and therefore must fly
- “Poor urban women are terrorized by the **Catch-22 situation** of being expected to maintain strict standards of modesty while lacking access to any private means of hygiene.”







# Sanitation as a Human Right

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/04/19/going-toilet-when-you-want/sanitation-human-right>

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/08/25/india-caste-forced-clean-human-waste>

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/08/25/india-caste-forced-clean-human-waste>

Please explain what Davis says about the **role of the British Empire** in the emergence of slums on the Indian subcontinent.

- “The global sanitation crisis defies hyperbole. **Its origins, as with many Third World urban problems, are rooted in colonialism. The European empires generally refused to provide modern sanitation and water infrastructures in native neighborhoods, preferring instead to use racial zoning and *cordons sanitaires* to segregate garrisons and white suburbs from epidemic disease;** postcolonial regimes from Accra to Hanoi thus inherited huge sanitation deficits that few regimes have been prepared to aggressively remedy.”
- sanitation crises cause for conflicts:
  - “class struggles over the ‘right to defecate’ as a continuation of a chronic conflict in colonial cities. Gooptu, for example, cites the 1932 case of squatters in Kanpur who, after the Municipal Board rebuffed their attempts to acquire potable water and sanitary latrines, invaded a field next to civil service bungalows and used it (in protest) as their communal latrine. The police were promptly called in and a riot ensued”



“A principal barrier, of course, was **European colonialism** which, in its most extreme form in the British colonial cities of eastern and southern Africa, denied native populations the rights of urban land ownership and permanent residence. **The British, always the ideologues of divide and rule**, feared that city life would ‘detrribalize’ Africans and foster anticolonial solidarities. Urban migration was controlled by pass laws, while vagrancy ordinances penalized informal labor.”

“In the subcontinent, the British also segregated and policed the influx from the countryside. In her brilliant study of the cities of Uttar Pradesh during the interwar years, Nandini Gooptu chronicles the unceasing efforts of colonial officials and newly enfranchised native elites to push the poor to the cities’ edges and beyond. The new fangled Town Improvement Trusts, in particular, were highly effective in clearing slums and removing so-called ‘plague spots’ from the interstices of better residential and commercial areas, and preserving spatial zoning around colonial and native middle-class areas. Vigorously enforced ‘encroachment laws,’ meanwhile, outlawed both squatting and street vending. At the same time, urban economic growth under the prewar Raj was fitful at best – even Bombay, with its famed entrepreneurial elites and textile factories, grew slowly, not even doubling its population in the half-century from 1891 to 1941.”

“**Despite their antipathy to large native urban settlements, the British were arguably the greatest slum-builders of all time.** Their policies in Africa forced the local labor force to live in precarious shantytowns on the fringes of segregated and restricted cities. **In India, Burma, and Ceylon, their refusal to improve sanitation or provide even the most minimal infrastructure to native neighborhoods ensured huge death tolls from early-twentieth-century epidemics (plague, cholera, influenza) and created immense problems of urban squalor that were inherited by national elites after independence.**”

Please describe, drawing on Mike Davis's book and the documentary, what the typical daily life of slum residents (on the Indian subcontinent) looks like, what the most pressing problems they face are, and what additional hardships especially women and children have to endure.

- **informality, lack of security/regulations**
- **constant threat of eviction, bulldozing, violence**
- **child labour**
- **diseases**
- **lack of ...**

“The full extent of contemporary child labor, of course, is zealously hidden from view and defies any straight forward measurement; nonetheless, what has been exposed is shocking.” (pp. 186-190)





For me, perhaps the most depressing point of all in Davis's book is the medical metaphor of the **“late-capitalist triage of humanity”**; what does this mean for India?

“The late-capitalist triage of humanity, then, has already taken place. As Jan Breman, writing of India, has warned: ‘A point of no return is reached when a reserve army waiting to be incorporated into the labour process becomes stigmatized as a permanently redundant mass, an excessive burden that cannot be included now or in the future, in economy and society. This metamorphosis is, in my opinion at least, the real crisis of world capitalism.’”

Ninth, and finally, under such **extreme conditions of competition**, the neoliberal prescription (as set out in the World Bank's 1995 World Development Report) of making labor even more flexible is simply catastrophic. De Soto's slogans [i.e., Hernando de Soto's brand of neoliberalism] simply grease the skids to a **Hobbesian hell**.

Those engaged in informal-sector competition under conditions of infinite labor supply usually stop short of **a total war of all against all**; conflict, instead, is usually transmuted into ethnoreligious or racial violence. The godfathers and landlords of the informal sector (invisible in most of the literature) intelligently use coercion, even chronic violence to regulate competition and protect their investments.





# 6+ Ausbeutung ist Alltag

Fast zwei Millionen Menschen arbeiten in Deutschland für weniger als fünf Euro pro Stunde. Daran wird auch der Mindestlohn nur wenig ändern. Denn Hungerlöhner stützen die deutsche Wirtschaft.

Von Matthias Bartsch, Michael Fröhlingdorf, Özlem Gezer, Gunther Latsch und Maximilian Popp

23.11.2014, 13.00 Uhr • aus DER SPIEGEL 48/2014



Rumänische Wanderarbeiter in ihrer Unterkunft in Frankfurt am Main Foto: THOMAS LOHNES / EPD

Lkw-Fahrer aus Osteuropa

# Lange Fahrten für wenig Geld



Ein Leben im Lkw: Oleg, ein Fahrer aus der Ukraine, fährt für ein polnisches Transportunternehmen. © Deutschlandradio / Gerhard Schröder

30:24 Minuten

Von Gerhard Schröder | 14.09.2021



↓ Audio herunterladen

Monatelang unterwegs, ohne jemals ein Hotel zu sehen, zu Dumpinglöhnen: Die Ausbeutung von Lkw-Fahrern auch auf Straßen hierzulande spitzt sich zu. Kontrollen sind schwierig und die Methoden der osteuropäischen Speditionsfirmen werden immer krimineller.





Die Arbeitsbedingungen in Großschlachthöfen kritisieren die Brüder Florian und Peter Kossen. Foto: Pixabay

**Gegen die Verantwortlichen in der Fleischindustrie im Oldenburger Land haben Prälat Peter Kossen und sein Bruder, der Arzt Florian Kossen, schwere Vorwürfe erhoben. Sie sprechen von „Sklaverei und Menschenschinderei“.**

Von [Christof Haverkamp](#)

Anzeige



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